

PROJECT CENSORED

THE MOST UNDERCOVERED NEWS IN AMERICA

The Project Censored voting team has selected the top news stories that deserved to receive major coverage in the US corporate media last year, but were significantly underreported.

The Project Censored team from Sonoma State University, California, under the directorship of Dr Peter Phillips, has released its list of the Top Censored Stories of 2001 and 2002. Media students, faculty staff and community experts were involved in the selection, screening and evaluation process. Project Censored's top 25 stories as well as the runners-up are summarised below in edited form, extracted from the book *Censored 2003* (Seven Stories Press; see review this issue). — Editor

1: FCC Moves to Privatisise Airwaves

For almost 70 years, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has administered and regulated the broadcast spectrum as an electronic "commons" on behalf of the American people. For a fee, the FCC issues licences to broadcasters that allow them to use, but not own, one or more specific radio or TV frequencies. Thus, the public has retained the ability to regulate, as well as influence, access to broadcast communications.

Several years ago, the Progress and Freedom Foundation, in its report, "The Telecom Revolution: An American Opportunity", recommended a complete privatisation of the radio frequencies, whereby broadcasters with existing licences would eventually gain complete ownership of their respective frequencies. They could thereafter develop them in markets of their choosing, or sell and trade them to other companies. The few non-allocated bands of the radiofrequency spectrum would be sold off, as electronic real estate, to the highest bidders. With nothing then to regulate, the FCC would eventually be abolished. The reasoning behind this radical plan was that government control of the airwaves has led to inefficiencies. In private hands, the frequencies would be exchanged in the marketplace, and the forces of free-market supply and demand would foster the most creative (and, of course, most profitable) use of these electronic "properties".

The course of wireless broadcasting is approaching an unprecedented and critical crossroads. The path taken by the United States, and by the other industrialised nations that may follow its lead, will profoundly influence the ability of the citizenry of each country to control the media democratically.

(Sources: *The Guardian*, April 28, 2001; *Mother Jones*, September/October 2001)

2: New Trade Treaty Seeks to Privatisise Global Social Services

A global trade agreement now being negotiated will seek to privatise nearly every government-provided public service and allow transnational corporations to run them for profit. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is a proposed free-trade agreement that will attempt to liberalise/dismantle barriers that protect government-provided social services. These are social services bestowed by the government in the name of public welfare. The GATS was established in 1994, at the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). In 1995, the GATS agreement was adopted by the newly created World Trade Organization (WTO).

Corporations plan to use the GATS to profit from the privatisation of educational systems, health care systems, child care, energy and municipal water services, postal services, libraries, museums and public transportation. If the GATS is finalised, it will lock in a privatised, for-profit model for the global economy. GATS/WTO would make it illegal for a government with privatised services ever to return to a publicly owned, non-profit model. Any government that disobeys these WTO rulings will face sanctions. What used to be areas of common heritage like seed banks, air and water supplies, health care, and education will be commodified, privatised and sold to the highest bidder on the open

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market. People who cannot afford these privatised services will be left out.

The WTO has hired a private company, the Global Division for Transnational Education, to document policies that "discriminate against foreign education providers". The results of this "study" will be used to pressure countries with public education systems to relinquish them to the global, privatised marketplace.

The futures of accountability for public services and of sovereign law are at stake with the GATS decision. Foreign corporations will have the right to establish themselves in any GATS/WTO-controlled country and compete against non-profit or government institutions, such as schools and hospitals, for public funds.

The current round of GATS negotiations has identified three main priorities for future free-trade principles:

1) GATS officials are pushing for "National Treatment" to be applied across the board. "National Treatment" would forbid governments from favouring their domestic companies over foreign-based companies. This will create an expansion of megacorporate access to domestic markets and further diminish democratic accountability.

2) GATS officials are seeking to place restrictions on domestic regulations. This would limit a government's ability to enact environmental, health and other regulations and laws that hinder "free trade".

3) Negotiators are attempting to develop the expansion of "Commercial Presence" rules. These rules allow all investors in one GATS-controlled country to establish a presence in any other GATS country. The investor will not only be allowed to compete against private suppliers for business, but will also be allowed to compete against publicly funded institutions and services for public funds.

(Sources: The Financial Times, London, October 19, 2000; The Ecologist, February 2001; The Gazette, Montreal, June 15, 2001; The Weekend Australian, August 25, 2001; The Herald, Glasgow, February 27, 2002; Toronto Star, March 3, 2002)

3: US Policies in Colombia Support Mass Murder

Over the past two years, Colombia has been Washington's third-largest recipient of foreign aid, behind only Israel and Egypt. In July 2000, the US Congress approved a \$1.3 billion war package for Colombia to support President Pastrana's "Plan Colombia". Plan Colombia is a \$7.5 billion counternarcotics initiative. In addition to this financial support, the US also trains the Colombian military.

Throughout these past two years, Colombian citizens have been the victims of human rights atrocities committed by the US-trained Colombian military and linked paramilitaries. Trade unionists and human rights activists face murder, torture and harassment. It is reported that Latin America remains the most dangerous place in the world for trade unionists; since 1986, some 4,000 unionists have been murdered in Colombia.

Another problem resulting from the Colombian "drug war" has been the health consequences of US-sponsored aerial fumigation. Since January 2001, Colombian aircraft have been spraying toxic herbicides over Colombian fields in order to kill opium poppy and coca plants. These sprayings are killing food crops that indigenous Colombians depend on for survival, as well as harming their

health. The sprayings have killed fish and livestock, and have contaminated water supplies.

US military aid is not improving conditions for the people of Colombia, but rather supporting a war against its citizens and those who are fighting for social justice. According to Jesse Isbell, an American member of the international steelworker delegation, who recently visited Columbia: "The US says one thing to the American public, when in reality it is [doing] something totally different. Our government portrays this as a drug war against cocaine, but all we are doing is keeping an ineffective government in power."

(Sources: Rachel's Environment & Health News, December 7, 2000; Steelabor, May/June 2001; Counterpunch, July 1-15, 2001; Asheville Global Report, October 4, 2001)

4: Bush Administration Hampered FBI Investigation into Bin Laden Family Before 9-11

A French book, *Bin Laden: La Vérité Interdite* (Bin Laden: The Forbidden Truth), claims that the Bush Administration halted investigations into terrorist activities related to the bin

Laden family and began planning for a war against Afghanistan before the events of September 11, 2001.

The authors, Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquié, are French intelligence analysts. Dasquié, an investigative reporter, publishes *Intelligence Online*, a respected newsletter on economics and diplomacy. Brisard worked for French secret services and in 1997 wrote a report on the al-Qa'ida network.

In 1996, high-placed intelligence sources in Washington told the *Guardian*: "There were always con-

straints on investigating the Saudis."

The authors allege that under the influence of US oil companies, George W. Bush and his administration initially halted investigations into terrorism, while bargaining with the Taliban to deliver Osama bin Laden in exchange for economic aid and political recognition. The book goes on to reveal that former FBI Deputy Director John O'Neill resigned in July 2001 in protest over the obstruction of terrorist investigations.

The BBC reiterated a well-known claim, made by one of George W. Bush's former business partners, that Bush made his first million dollars 20 years ago from a company financed by Osama's elder brother, Salem. It has also been revealed that both the Bush family and the bin Ladens had lucrative stakes in The Carlyle Group, a private investment firm that has grown to be one of the largest investors in US defence and communications contracts.

Brisard and Dasquié contend that the government's main objective in Afghanistan was to unite the Taliban regime in order to gain access to the oil and gas reserves in Central Asia. They report that the Bush Administration began negotiations with the Taliban directly after coming into power, and representatives met several times in Washington, Islamabad and Berlin. There were also claims that the last meeting between the United States and Taliban representatives took place only five weeks before the attacks in New York and Washington.

Long before the 9-11 attack, the United States had decided to invade Afghanistan in the interest of oil. In February 1998, at the hearing before a subgroup of the Committee on International

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Relations, Congress discussed ways to deal with Afghanistan to make way for an oil pipeline.

Jane's Defence Newsletter reported in March 2001 that an invasion of Afghanistan was being planned. The *Times of India* reported that in June 2001, the US government told India that there would be an invasion of Afghanistan in October of that year. In July 2001, George Arney, with the BBC, also reported the planned invasion.

Sources: The Guardian, London, November 7, 2001; The Times of India, November 8, 2001; Pulse of the Twin Cities, January 16, 2002)

5: US Intentionally Destroyed Iraq's Water System

During the Gulf War, the United States deliberately bombed Iraq's water system. After the war, the US pushed sanctions to prevent importation of necessary supplies for water purification. These actions resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians, many of whom were young children. Documents have been obtained from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), which prove that the Pentagon was fully aware of the mortal impacts on civilians in Iraq and was actually monitoring the degradation of Iraq's water supply. The destruction of civilian infrastructures necessary for health and welfare is a direct violation of the Geneva Convention.

After the Gulf War, the United Nations applied sanctions against Iraq, which denied the importation of specialised equipment and chemicals, such as chlorine for purification of water. There are six documents that have been partially declassified and can be found on the Pentagon's website at <http://www.gulfink.osd.mil>. These documents include information that proves that the United States was fully aware of the costs to civilians, especially children, by upholding the sanctions against purification of Iraq's water supply.

The primary document is dated January 22, 1991, and is titled "Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities". This document predicts what will take place when Iraq can no longer import the vital commodities to cleanse their water supply. It states that epidemics and disease outbreaks may occur because of pollutants and bacteria that exist in unpurified water. The document acknowledges the fact that without purified drinking water, the manufacturing of food and medicine will also be affected. The possibilities of the Iraqis' obtaining clean water, despite sanctions, along with a timetable describing the degradation of Iraq's water supply, were also addressed.

The remaining five documents from the DIA confirm the Pentagon's monitoring of the situation in Iraq. In more than one document, the likely outbreaks of diseases and how they affect civilians, "particularly children", are discussed in great detail. The final document, titled "Iraq: Assessment of Current Health Threats and Capabilities", is dated November 15, 1991, and discusses the development of a counterpropaganda strategy that would blame Saddam Hussein for the lack of safe water in Iraq.

The United States' insistence on using this type of sanction against Iraq is in direct violation of the Geneva Convention. The United Nations estimates that more than 500,000 Iraqi children have died as a result of sanctions and that unclean water is a major contributor to these deaths.

(Source: The Progressive, September 2001)

6: US Government Pushing Nuclear Revival

The US government is blazing a trail of nuclear weapon revival leading to global nuclear dominance. A nuke-revival group, supported by people like Stephen Younger, Associate Director for Nuclear Weapons at Los Alamos, proposes a "mini-nuke" capable of burrowing into underground weapon supplies and unleashing a small but contained nuclear explosion. This weapons advocacy group is comprised of nuclear scientists, Department of Energy (DOE) officials, right-wing analysts, former government officials and a congressionally appointed oversight panel. The group wants to ensure that the US continues to develop nuclear capacity into the next half-century.

Princeton theoretical physicist Robert W. Nelson has studied the question for the Federation of American Scientists. Nelson concluded: "No earth-burrowing missile can penetrate deep enough into the earth to contain an explosion with a nuclear yield even as small as one per cent of the 15-kiloton Hiroshima weapon. The explosion simply blows out a massive crater of radioactive dirt, which rains down on the local region with an especially intense and deadly fallout."

(Source: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, July/August 2001)

7: Corporations Promote HMO Model for School Districts

For decades, public schools have purchased innumerable products and services from private companies—from textbooks to bus transportation. Within the last decade, however, privatisation has taken on a whole new meaning.

"Education today, like health care 30 years ago, is a vast, highly localised industry ripe for change," says Mary Tanner, Managing Director of Lehman Brothers. "The emergence

of HMOs and hospital management companies created enormous opportunities for investors. We believe the same pattern will occur in education."

So while the aptly named Educational Management Organisations (EMOs) are being promoted as the new answer to impoverished school districts and dilapidated classrooms, the real emphasis is on investment returns rather than student welfare and educational development.

(Sources: The Progressive Populist, November 15, 2000; North Coast Xpress, Winter 2000; In These Times, June 2001; Multinational Monitor, January/February 2002)

8: NAFTA Destroys Farming Communities in US and Abroad

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are responsible for the impoverishment of and loss of many small farms in Mexico and Haiti. NAFTA is also causing the economic destruction of rural farming communities in the United States and Canada. The resulting loss of rural employment has created a landslide of socio-economic and environmental consequences that are worsening with the continued dismantling and deregulation of trade barriers.

When NAFTA came before Congress in 1993, US farmers were told that the agreement would open the borders of Mexico and Canada, enabling them to sell their superior products and achieve previously unknown prosperity. Corporations which operate

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throughout the Americas, such as Tyson and Cargill, have since used the farming surplus to drive down costs, pitting farmers against each other and prohibiting countries from taking protective actions. These same corporations have entered into massive farming ventures outside the US and use NAFTA to import cheaper agricultural products back into this country, further undermining the small farmers in the US. Since the enactment of NAFTA, 80 per cent of foodstuffs coming into the US are products that displace US-raised crops.

NAFTA has allowed multinational megacorporations to increase production in Mexico, where they can profit from much cheaper labour as well as freely use chemicals and pesticides banned in the US. In both Mexico and Haiti, NAFTA policies have caused an exodus from rural areas, forcing people to live in urban slums and accept low-paid sweatshop work. Farmers in Mexico, unable to compete with the large-scale importation and chemical-intensive mass production of US agricultural corporations, are swimming in a corn surplus that has swelled approximately 450 per cent since NAFTA's implementation. Haiti's deregulation of trade with the US has destroyed the island's rice industry in a similar manner. Urban slums, engorged with rural economic refugees, are contributing to the breakdown of cultural traditions and public authority, making the growing masses increasingly ungovernable.

(Sources: Fellowship Magazine, December 2000/January 2001; The Hightower Lowdown, September 2001)

9: US Faces Housing Crisis

The national housing crisis affects nearly six million American families and is growing worse. Over 1.5 million low-cost housing units have recently been lost, and millions of children are growing up in housing that is substandard, unaffordable and dangerous.

A new crisis in affordable housing is spreading across America. What was once a problem relegated to low-income families along the East and West coasts is now affecting the middle class all across the country. Middle-class working Americans are having just as much trouble finding affordable housing as low-income families did 10 years ago.

Homelessness has become the result for many families across the nation. The economic slowdown, the welfare reform of 1996 and the events of September 11 are pushing hard-working Americans into the street. In New York alone, it is estimated that 30,000 people are living in shelters and many thousands more live on the street. In Chicago, more than 20,000 units of public housing have been removed from service and some 50,000 people now reside in the streets.

In an era when there is only one apartment for every six potential renters in the US, Congress has taken no action to address this problem. Corporate media have only covered this issue locally, and few media reports have recognised this as a national crisis.

(Source: In These Times, November 2000)

10: CIA Double Deals in Macedonia

The CIA destabilised the political balance in Macedonia to allow easier access for a US/British-owned oil pipeline and to prevent Macedonia from entering the European Union (EU),

thereby strengthening the US dollar in a German deutschmark-dominated region. Without Macedonia in the EU, British and US oil companies have an advantage over European counterparts in building oil pipelines. Actions toward destabilisation intend to impose economic control over national currencies and protect British-US oil companies, such as BP-Amoco-ARCO, Chevron and Texaco against Europe's TotalFinaElf.

The British-US consortium controls the AMBO trans-Balkans pipeline project linking the Bulgarian port of Burgas to Vlore on the Albanian-Adriatic coastline. The power game is designed to increase British-US domination in the region by distancing Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania from the influence of EU countries such as Germany, Italy, France and Belgium. It's an effort supported by Wall Street's financial establishment, to destabilise and discredit the deutschmark and the euro, with hopes of imposing the US dollar as the sole currency for the region.

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the National Liberation Army (NLA) were trained in Macedonia by British Special Forces and equipped by the CIA. British military sources confirm that Gezim Ostremi, NLA Commander, was sponsored by the UN and trained by British Special Forces to head the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). When Ostremi left his job as a

United Nations officer to join the NLA, the commander remained on the UN payroll. Attacks within Macedonia by the NLA/KLA last year coincided chronologically with the process of EU enlargement and the signing of the historic Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Macedonia. These attacks paved the way for further US military and political presence in the region.

In a strange twist the CIA, NATO and British Special Forces provided weapons and training to the NLA/KLA terrorists, while at the same time Germany provided

Macedonia's security forces with all-terrain vehicles, advanced weapons and equipment to protect themselves from NLA/KLA attacks. US military advisers, on assignment to the NLA/KLA through private mercenary companies, remained in contact with NATO and US military and intelligence planners. It was Washington and London that decided on the broad direction of NLA/KLA military operations in Macedonia.

Following the August 2001 Framework Peace Agreement, 3,500 armed NATO troops entered Macedonia with the intent of disarming Albanian rebels. Washington's humanitarian efforts for the NLA/KLA suggested its intent to protect the terrorists rather than disarm them. Vice President Dick Cheney's former firm, Halliburton Energy, is directly linked to the AMBO trans-Balkans oil pipeline project.

Last year's conflict in Macedonia is a small part of a growing rift between the Anglo-American and European interests in the Balkans. In the wake of the war in Yugoslavia, Britain has allied itself with the US and severed many of its ties with Germany, France and Italy. Washington's design is to ensure the dominance of the US military-industrial complex, in alliance with Britain's major defence contractors and British-US oil. These developments establish significant control over strategic pipelines, transportation and communication corridors in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

(Source: <http://www.globalresearch.ca>, June 14, 2001)

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11: George W. Bush Appoints Former Criminals to Key Government Roles

Since becoming US President, George W. Bush has brought back into government service men who were discredited by criminal involvement in the Iran–Contra affair, lying to Congress and other felonies while working for his father, George Bush, Senior, and Ronald Reagan.

In February 2001, John Poindexter was appointed to head the new Information Awareness Office (IAO), an offshoot of the Pentagon-based Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). After serving as Reagan's National Security Advisor, John Poindexter was charged and found guilty of conspiracy, obstruction of justice and the destruction of evidence as he played a central role in the Iran–Contra affair. Costa Rica has officially declared Poindexter to be a drug trafficker, and has barred him from entering the country.

Elliot Abrams was recently appointed to the National Security Council (NSC) as Director of its Office for Democracy, Human Rights and International Relations. In 1991, Abrams pleaded guilty to withholding evidence from Congress regarding his role in the Iran–Contra affair. As Reagan's Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, he used

to oversee US foreign policy in Latin America and was active in covering up some of the worst atrocities committed by the US-sponsored Contras. According to congressional records, under Abrams's watch the Contras "raped, tortured and killed unarmed civilians, including children" and "groups of civilians, including women and children, were burned, dismembered, blinded and beheaded". George Bush, Senior, subsequently pardoned him. (Sources: The Nation, May 7, 2001; In These Times, August 6, 2001; Extra!, September/October 2001; The Guardian, February 8, 2002)

12: NAFTA's Chapter 11 Overrides Public Protection Laws of Countries

Certain investor protections in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) are giving business investors new power over sovereign nations and providing an expansive new definition of property rights.

Chapter 11 of NAFTA, which allows a corporation to sue a government, contains a particularly disturbing "regulatory takings" clause. Under this "takings" clause, intangible property, such as a corporation's potential future profits, is considered private property. Any law or regulation that is imposed to protect the public interest is considered "taking" that company's potential to make a profit. Therefore, the government should be required to compensate the owners for lost property/profit.

This expanded definition of private property goes beyond established terms in US jurisprudence and supersedes domestic law. NAFTA's investor protections and the "regulatory takings" idea mimic a radical revision of constitutional law that the right wing has been pushing for years.

Some companies have already triumphed in their quest to acquire financial compensation for the loss of potential profit. In 2000, the Metaclad Corporation won a suit against the Mexican government. The outcome of the case means that US\$16.7 million of Mexican taxpayers' money will go to Metaclad in compensation for profits lost because the government stopped it from building a toxic waste dump.

(Sources: The Nation, October 15, 2001; Terrain, Fall 2001)

13: Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford Lied to the American Public about East Timor

The release of previously classified documents makes it clear that former US President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in a face-to-face meeting in Jakarta, gave then-President Suharto the green light for the 1975 invasion of East Timor.

According to documents released by the National Security Archive (NSA) in December 2001 (the 26th anniversary of Indonesia's invasion of East Timor), Suharto told Ford during their talks on December 6, 1975, that "We want your understanding if it was deemed necessary to take rapid or drastic action [in East Timor]".

For years, Henry Kissinger has denied that any discussion of East Timor took place in Jakarta. The newly released dialogue between the three adds significantly to what is known about the role the US played in condoning the Indonesian invasion. The dialogue was part of a batch of documents on US policy affecting East Timor, obtained through the National Security Archive.

Indonesia invaded East Timor the day after Ford and Kissinger left. As many as 230,000 East Timorese died as a result of Indonesia's invasion and the 23-year occupation of the country. As much as one third of the population died as a result of starvation and disease caused by counterinsurgency operations carried out by the Indonesian Army from 1976 to 1999.

According to Amnesty International, East Timor represents one of the worst cases of genocide in the 20th century.

(Source: Asheville Global Report, December 13, 2001)

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14: New Laws Restrict Access to Abortions in US

A quiet war against abortion rights is being conducted by many local governments in the United States. Cities and counties are placing repressive legal restrictions on abortion providers under the guise of women's health laws. These restrictions can be on the width of hallways, the type of jet and angle of drinking fountains, the height of ceilings, and how long one must wait between initially seeing the doctor and when the procedure can be performed.

These legal ordinances are known as TRAP laws. TRAP stands for Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers. These laws attempt to restrict all aspects of the physical environment related to an abortion. While deemed women's health laws, many are seldom applied to any medical facility other than abortion clinics. The goal of TRAP laws is to discourage a woman's legal right to choose abortion. In the words of one right-to-life leader, the idea is to create an environment where abortion may indeed be perfectly legal, but no one can get one."

(Source: Mother Jones, September/October 2001)

15: Bush's Energy Plan Threatens Environment and Public Health

The Bush Administration's energy plan will actually increase air pollution in the United States. The plan calls for increased fossil fuel consumption and for decreased funding for research into renewable, clean energy development. The plan also lowers upgrade requirements on 30- to 60-year-old power plants that often emit 4-10 times as much sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide and mercury as newer power plants. The administration stands behind this plan despite higher smog levels, increased respiratory-related hospital visits and record-high asthma cases on the East Coast last year.

Although Bush conceded earlier in his presidency that global warming is underway and that steps must be taken to reduce emissions, the US is still responsible for 25 per cent of the world's emissions. The Bush plan puts into jeopardy the New Source Review (NSR) provision, which is a vital part of the Clean Air Act. The NSR requires facilities to offset pollution increases with reductions elsewhere in the facility or demonstrate that the facility is using the best available pollution control technology.

Major power, coal and oil companies which own power plants that were built between 1940 and 1970 have sought to ease the restrictions of the NSR, claiming that the law hurts their business due to high costs of upgrading to the best available pollution control technology. The EPA and several states have successfully sued a number of large utilities for violation of this NSR provision. These legal victories have led to millions of dollars in penalties.

Additionally, the Bush plan calls for a slashing of funding in research for renewable, clean forms of energy such as wind and solar power, which can provide very effective amounts of energy for US consumption. The slashing of funding for research into clean, renewable energy and increased dependence on fossil fuels will speed up the effects of global warming and have a detrimental effect on our health and environment.

(Sources: The Progressive Populist, March 1-5, 2002; Environment News Service, July 2001)

16: CIA Kidnaps Suspects for Overseas Torture and Execution

US agents are involved in abducting people they suspect of terrorist activities and sending them to countries where torture during interrogation is legal, according to US diplomatic sources. Suspects are shipped to allied countries where they are denied legal assistance and imprisoned without any specific charges made against them. The prisoners have been taken to countries such as Egypt and Jordan (whose intelligence agencies have close ties to the CIA), where they can be subjected to interrogation tactics, including torture and threats to family, which are illegal in the United States.

According to one US diplomat: "After September 11, these sorts of movements have been occurring. It allows us to get information from terrorists in a way we can't do on US soil."

Although such "movements" have intensified since 9-11, the US has long been involved in this practice of kidnapping. These abductions, known to those in the business as "rendition", violate local and international extradition laws as well as internationally recognised human rights standards.

According to the *Washington Post's* sources, from 1993 to 1999

suspects were rendered to the US from a variety of countries including South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and The Philippines. US officials have acknowledged some of these operations, but the *Post's* sources say that dozens of other covert renditions occurred, the details of which remain cloaked in secrecy.

(Sources: The Weekend Australian, February 23, 2002; The Washington Post, March 11, 2002; World Socialist website, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/mar2002/>, March 20, 2002)

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17: Corporate Media Ignore Key Issues of Anti-Globalisation Protests

The US press failed to inform the public of the core, underlying issues of the major anti-globalisation protests of recent years. Dramatic images such as protesters enshrouded in tear gas, facing down a line of police officers dressed in riot gear, have come to dominate the media coverage and overshadow the actual reasons that thousands of people are taking to the streets.

In July 2001, over 100,000 people went to Genoa to protest the G8 meetings. However, corporate television gave little recognition to the issues that were being raised by the protesters. CNN showed few protesters actually sharing their views and reasons for protesting.

Instead, news correspondents briefly summed up the protest in terms of who was there. This broad summary format was significantly lacking attention to specifics of the meetings or the protests. On Fox networks, the Genoa protesters were all but ignored.

A hard look at more than 200 stories by major news outlets, including ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, NBC, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek*, shows serious weaknesses in the coverage of the four largest protests: the International Monetary Fund meeting in Prague in September 2000; the Hemispheric Free Trade talks in Quebec City in April 2001; the European Union summit in Gothenburg, Sweden, in June 2001; and the G8 meeting that took place in Genoa in July 2001. The problem is not so much the focus on the

small percentage of protesters who acted violently, but that the coverage lacks context.

The message that protesters are trying to get across is that they want more democratic control (and less corporate control) over the rules that affect the environment and labour conditions around the world. This includes more democratic control over supranational organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organization, whose un-elected leaders, the protesters argue, override democratically determined laws and regulations in the name of "development" and "free trade".

(Sources: Columbia Journalism Review, September/October 2001; The New York Times, February 5, 2002)

18: World's Coral Reefs Dying

One-quarter of all coral reefs have been destroyed by pollution, sedimentation, overfishing and rapid global climate change. Coral reefs have survived enormous changes in our planet's past, but today they are experiencing challenges from a multitude of new fronts. Remaining reefs are in such peril that governments are preparing for the contingency that millions of island residents will need to be relocated. Under assault from pollution, coastal development, agricultural runoff, overpopulation and overfishing, the world's reefs are exhibiting their vulnerability in many ways.

In the last two decades, worldwide coral bleaching events associated with higher sea-water temperatures have destroyed reefs throughout entire ocean basins. The 1997-98 El Niño killed 70 per cent of all corals in the Indian Ocean from Africa to India, and the reefs of the Galapagos Islands have yet to show signs of recovery from the bleaching event 17 years ago. Increases in ultraviolet rays entering the atmosphere have contributed to the bleaching effect in coral reefs worldwide.

The worldwide trade in aquarium fishing, currently worth US\$200 million per year, is another source of coral reef destruction. The collection methods for exotic fish include using poisons, primarily sodium cyanide, which destroy entire ecosystems in order to capture the few remaining fish on the perimeter. Blast fishery, also common in such places as The Philippines, is a practice whereby fish for local consumption are collected with explosives, killing the fish at the epicentre and incapacitating those on the perimeters. The blasts reduce the reefs to rubble, from which they may never recover.

(Source: Harper's, January 2001)

19: American Companies Exploit the Congo

Western multinational corporations' attempts to cash in on the wealth of the Congo's resources have resulted in what many have called "Africa's first world war", claiming the lives of over three million people. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been labelled "the richest patch of earth on the planet". The valuable abundance of minerals and resources in the DRC has made it the target of attacks from US-supported neighbouring African countries Uganda and Rwanda.

The DRC is mineral-rich with millions of tons of diamonds, copper, cobalt, zinc, manganese, uranium, niobium and tantalum (also known as coltan). Coltan has become an increasingly valuable resource to American corporations; it is used to make mobile phones, night vision goggles, fibre optics, and capacitors used to maintain the electrical charge in computer chips. In December 2000, the shortage of coltan was the main reason that the popular sale of the Sony Play Station 2 video game came to an abrupt halt.

The DRC holds 80 per cent of the world's coltan reserves, more than 60 per cent of the world's cobalt, and is the world's largest supplier of high-grade copper. With these minerals playing a major part in maintaining US military dominance and economic growth, minerals in the Congo are deemed vital US interests.

Historically, the US government identified sources of materials in Third World countries and then encouraged US corporations to invest in and facilitate their production. Dating back to the mid-1960s, the US government literally installed the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko, which gave US corporations access to the

Congo's minerals for more than 30 years. However, over the years Mobutu began to limit access by Western corporations, and to control the distribution of resources. In 1998, US military-trained leaders of Rwanda and Uganda invaded the mineral-rich areas of the Congo. The invaders installed illegal colonial-style governments that continue to receive millions of dollars in arms and military training from the United States. The US government and a US\$5 million Citibank loan maintains the rebel presence in the Congo. Their control of mineral-rich areas allows Western corporations, such as American Mineral Fields (AMF), to mine illegally. Rwandan and Ugandan control over this area is beneficial for both governments and for the corporations that continue to exploit the Congo's natural wealth.

(Sources: CovertAction Quarterly, Summer 2000; Voice, Pioneer Valley, MA, March/April 2001; Dollars and Sense, July/August 2001; The Voice News, Winstead, CT, January 4, 2002)

20: Novartis's Gene Research Endangers Plant Life

Scientists working for Swiss food giant Novartis have developed and patented a method for "switching off" the immune systems of plants—to the outrage of environmentalists and Third World charities who believe the new technology to be the most dangerous use so far of gene modification.

Patents filed by Novartis, manufacturers of Ovatine, reveal that its scientists expect to be able to use the radical biotechnology for almost every crop on Earth. Novartis claims that the new use of genetic modification (GM) will give farmers greater control over disease and boost production. But critics insist that it will make Third World farmers dependent on buying the company's chemicals each year to produce healthy harvests.

Environmentalists fear the new technology could have a disastrous ecological impact if crops with suppressed immune systems are allowed to cross-pollinate with surrounding plant life. The use of GM technology which uses chemicals to activate genetic

One-quarter of all coral reefs have been destroyed by pollution, sedimentation, overfishing and rapid global climate change.

traits was specifically condemned by the UN earlier this year. It recommended that the technology not be field-tested, and called for a moratorium on its development until the impact had been fully assessed.

The patent documents seen by the *Observer* suggest that Novartis intends to use the new GM technology on barley, cucumbers, tobacco, rice, chillis, wheat, bananas and tomatoes. The company cites an extensive list of more than 80 crops, including several cereals, dozens of fruits such as apples, pears and strawberries, vegetables like beans and lentils, and cash crops like cotton and tea.

Dr Sue Mayer, Director of Gene Watch, says: "These companies should halt development of these potentially dangerous products until there has been a proper assessment of whether they are good for agriculture."

(Source: *The Observer, London, October 8, 2000*)

21: Large US Temp Company Undermines Union Jobs and Mistreats Workers

Labor Ready Inc. is a national temporary employment agency that employed over 700,000 people in 2000. Labor Ready has 839 offices in 49 US states and in Canada, and stands ready to place temporary workers as strike-breakers in union labour disputes. During the recent Northwest steel strike, it was Labor Ready which provided hundreds of strikebreakers to Kaiser Aluminum in Spokane, Washington.

Labor Ready temps are often paid minimum wages for what can be very rigorous construction work. They receive no health benefits and can be seriously mistreated in their temporary places of employment. Workers are required to arrive at despatch offices between 5.00 and 6.00 am and wait for daily referrals; however, they are not paid for the waiting time at the despatch office. Labor Ready workers also have to pay an average of US\$1.58 when they cash their daily paychecks at the company's cash-dispensing machines. In 1999, the company raked in \$7.7 million in fees from these machines. Labor Ready's worker injury rate is three times the national average.

The AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department (BCTD) has supported class action lawsuits by former Labor Ready employees, and would like to see a national union organising efforts to protect temporary workers nationwide.

(Source: *The Progressive Populist, June 1, 2001*)

22: Fish Farms Threaten Health of Consumers and Aquatic Habitats

Farmed fish provide one-third of the seafood consumed by people worldwide. In the US, aquaculture supplies almost all of the catfish and trout as well as half of the shrimp and salmon. In the early 1990s, the fledgling aquaculture industry was hailed as a remedy to the problem of marine overfishing and the subsequent decline in jobs for fishermen. Unfortunately, aquaculture's harm to people and surrounding environments may be greater than its highly anticipated benefits.

A recent Canadian study found that a single serving of farmed salmon contains three to six times the World Health Organization's recommended daily intake limit for dioxins and

PCBs. A salmon farm of 200,000 fish releases an amount of nitrogen, phosphorus and faecal matter roughly equivalent to the nutrient waste in untreated sewage from 20,000 to 25,000 people. Farmed salmon (usually called Atlantic or cultured Atlantic salmon) are genetically modified to be larger and have a 50 to 70 per cent higher metabolic rate.

There is also a wide range of chemicals used in aquaculture, including antibiotics, parasiticides, pesticides, hormones, anaesthetics, minerals and vitamins. The use of these antibiotics is a health risk for fish as well as people, since it promotes the spread of antibiotic resistance in both human and fish pathogens.

(Sources: Mother Jones, *November/December 2001*; *Pew Oceans Commission Report on Marine Aquaculture, 2001*, website <http://www.pewoceans.org>)

23: Horses Face Lives of Unnecessary Abuse for Drug Company Profits

Premarin, the top-selling hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for menopausal women, is made from pregnant mares' urine (PMU). Oestrogen is extracted from the urine and is sold in many different forms to help with the symptoms of menopause. Approximately nine million women are currently taking some

form of Premarin, and that number is expected to rise as the baby-boomer population ages.

Premarin, made by Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, a subsidiary of American Home Products, is the only human oestrogen replacement drug that is derived from animal products; most others are derived from soy and vegetables. The patent on Premarin, owned by Wyeth-Ayerst, is about to expire. This may well result in the manufacture of an array of generic substitutes, and is likely to increase the number of horses used in this industry.

Pregnant mares are four-legged drug machines, being repeatedly impregnated and confined to narrow stalls as their urine is collected. Horses are kept inside for six months out of the year. The horses are housed in cramped stalls no bigger than 8 feet x 3½ feet x 5 feet, and are hooked up to urine collection bags that are fixed into position just below the tail. These urine collection devices (UCDs) are painful and unhygienic. Urine soaks the skin of the vulva and can cause severe infection and painful lesions. The horses are tied with a short rope to keep them from taking more than a single step in either direction or from lying down. After several years on line, the mares are shipped to slaughterhouses where they are butchered, so their meat can be exported to Europe or Japan for human consumption.

Guidelines state that horses should be offered water no less than twice a day. However, PMU farmers prefer to give water as little as possible, to keep the concentration of oestrogen in the urine high. They are paid based on the concentration, not the volume, of urine collected.

Every spring, each mare gives birth to a foal. These foals spend the first few months with their mothers and then are rounded up in September to allow their mothers to rejoin the lines. Most of these young horses are then taken to feedlots where they are

Premarin, the top-selling hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for menopausal women, is made from pregnant mares' urine.

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fattened up and sold for slaughter. The meat is then exported to European and Asian markets for human consumption.

(Source: *The Animals' Agenda*, March/April 2001)

24: Wal-Mart Takes Union Busting to the State Level

Wal-Mart has been pouring a considerable amount of money into a political campaign supporting a law that will reduce the wages and benefits for workers in Oklahoma. Oklahomans voted on the "right-to-work" law in September 2001. The law bans labour contracts that require workers to pay union dues or representation fees. The law also makes it difficult for unions to negotiate solid contracts.

Wal-Mart hopes to use Oklahoma as a model for a renewed campaign to reduce the wages and benefits for workers nationwide. This campaign will inevitably undermine the ability of unions to organise effectively. The right-to-work law has union members angered and concerned, as expressed by a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers:

"Union members across the country should take note of Wal-Mart's support of measures like "right to work" before they spend any of their union wages at Wal-Mart stores."

Oklahoma rejected a right-to-work law in 1964, when Martin Luther King, Jr. came to campaign against the proposal. This time around, however, powerful right-wing interests combined with Wal-Mart to push the initiative. The *Daily Oklahoman* contributed advertising space and Governor Frank Keating and US Senator Don Nickles campaigned in support of passage.

(Source: *Madison Capital Times*, August 2001)

25: US Federal Government Bails Out Private Prisons

For close to a decade, the private prison industry was booming because state legislators thought they could be both tough on crime and fiscally conservative by contracting with private prisons. However, private prisons have been rife with more abuse and lawsuits than state-run prisons, leading to a decline in state-level support. By last year, not a single state solicited private contracts and many contracts were

rolled back or even rescinded as a result of inefficiency and abuses.

While most state correctional officials are aware of the problems, the federal government continues to expand contracts with the private prison industry. Private prison industry officials make significant campaign contributions and their lobbyists have spread their influence widely in Congress. High-ranking private prison company officials have served as directors of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) under former Presidents Reagan and Bush.

(Sources: *The American Prospect*, September 10, 2001; *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2001)

Editor's Note:

Our coverage of Project Censored's top 25 news stories for 2001–2002 is extracted and edited from *Censored 2003*, published by Seven Stories Press (see review this edition and visit the website <http://www.sevenstories.com>).

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